DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 450 591 FL 026 608

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TITLE	Making the Most of Movies: Keeping Film Response Journals. Classroom Ideas.
PUB DATE	2000-04-00
NOTE	8p.
PUB TYPE	Journal Articles (080)
JOURNAL CIT	Modern English Teacher; v9 n2 2000 p40-45
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Classroom Techniques; College Students; Communicative Competence (Languages); *English (Second Language); Films; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; Instructional Innovation; *Journal Writing; Learning Strategies; *Listening Skills; Second Language Instruction; *Second Language Learning; Skill Development; Teaching Methods; Writing Assignments
IDENTIFIERS	Japan

ABSTRACT

This article describes how Japanese college freshman English language learners are assigned to watch two English language films per month and keep journals in the form of a simple film review. The response to the extensive outside listening has been very favorable; the instructor found that even students who usually have trouble doing their traditional assignments on time were apt to complete this film watching assignments on time. The film response journals were found to be an engaging and powerful way to provide language input and motivate students to improve both their listening and communication skills. Ideas are presented to help integrate film response journals into other lessons. The recommended procedure is as follows: preview, view/review, recall, recount, record, rewind and replay, review, and report. A list of 24 recent American films appropriate for this pedagogical activity is provided. (KFT)

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Making the most of movies: keeping film response journals

***William R Holden*, Associate Professor in the Department of Foreign Languages at Hokuriku University, Japan, gets his students watching, then talking and writing about films. Here he explains how, and what they get out of it.**

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Making the most of movies: keeping film response journals

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For the last several years, I have been asking Japanese university freshmen English majors to watch two films a month outside class, in addition to the roughly 16 hours per month of 'communicative' language instruction they receive in the classroom, and to keep journals. I use the term 'journals' loosely here to mean that the film reviews follow a simple recount-the-event-and-respond-to-it pattern and that they are done on a regular schedule.

The response to extensive outside listening has generally been quite favorable; I have also found that students who were once loathe to complete 'traditional' listening homework are now much more consistent in keeping up with their assignments. For instructors whose workplace has a video library, or who are willing to put their own video collection at the disposal of their students, film response journals are an engaging and useful way to provide language input and motivate students to improve their listening ability. Authentic video input, in addition to its usefulness in assisting learners to develop their listening skills, can also provide realistic and entertaining linguistic and cultural input, and stimulate learner involvement in ways that commercially available listening material has failed to do.

Background

Allan (1985) proposed a simple distinction between video material explicitly designed for language teaching and video material which was developed for entertainment, informational or other purposes, and noted a number of assumptions which seem implicit here on the part of educational materials developers: the first is that material which is designed for language instruction has a fundamentally different purpose from that which is not, that the goals of instruction take precedence over or preclude entertainment or informational value, and that learners need to have their attention consciously drawn to specific 'target language' and/or structures rather than to the more general 'model language'. However, each of these assumptions is to some degree at odds with what is currently understood of the second language acquisition process. (cf Ellis 1994)

Advantages of authentic film in L2 instruction (after Stempleski, 1994)

- enjoyable and entertaining
- increase learners' interest
- learner controls material, level of input, length of viewing session

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- inherently more memorable than listening tapes or 'educational' videos
- a springboard to conversations about 'real-life' topics and shared experience
- context provokes emotional response, promotes listener involvement
- not intended to elicit specific responses or 'the answer', thus removing pressure to 'get it right'
- motivating: learners are encouraged to find and watch films which they find personally relevant, worthwhile and comprehensible
- authentic window on foreign culture: members of X culture find this entertaining, rather than this film realistically portrays life in country X.

Development of listening skills

- native-speed speech with natural prosodics occurring in an integrated, meaningful, context
- action and speech are realistic/authentic (though scripted)
- promotes familiarity with various accents, dialects, idiolects
- exposes learners to regionalisms, idioms or 'colorful' language
- dialogue/language input clearly tied to development of dramatic action or plot
- gestures, facial expressions lend meaning to stress, intonation
- visual information facilitates understanding of unfamiliar language
- learners understand that what is said is not always what is meant
- understanding of implication, inference and deduction are encouraged
- learners are encouraged to 'listen with their eyes' as we do in life.

Development of communicative skills

- learners are observers/reporters; the procedure outlined below asks learners to remember (recall), recount (speak) and record (write) the plot outline and their impressions of the film
- promotes the development of critical, analytical and observation skills
- develops ability to separate germane from non-germane information and condense and present it
- focuses on writing as an outgrowth of the need to communicate, and integrates written work with listening and speaking activities
- written work can be used to alternatively introduce, recycle, review and/or record language which learners encounter
- promotes familiarity with generic conventions and the ability to write to a simple model
- maintains a written record of student work for assessment, dialogue, research, or use by incoming students as a guide to the video library
- encourages learners to interpret and respond subjectively in ways not possible with traditional listening material
- provides a natural basis for conversation
- enables less linguistically competent or confident students to 'rehearse' before speaking, and leaves a written account for revision and later comparison
- instructors have the option of incorporating the following language points and communicative strategies:
  reported speech; passive voice; past, past continuous, past perfect tenses; expressions for actions which occur simultaneously; expressions of time; coordinating conjunctions; discourse markers for chronology and sequence;

chronological and logical development of oral reports; paraphrasing, use of synonyms; circumlocution; expressions for cause and effect relations; checking partner's understanding, interjecting, clarifying, revising, and turn taking.

Integrating film response journals into lessons

Part of one class very early in the semester is used to explain to students how they should undertake steps 1-3 (pre-view, view/review, recall). Steps 4 & 5 (recount, record) are introduced a week later, after students have (theoretically) viewed an entire film. Students learn in class at this time how to write a synopsis or summary of the film's dramatic development. Step 6 (rewind & replay) is assigned as homework, and steps 7 & 8, (review, report) introduced and begun in class. Students generally run out of time or realize that their recall of the film is at this point not sufficient for them to satisfactorily write or explain their impressions, so they watch the film again at home in the intervening week before completing their reviews as homework, or as classwork the following week if further instruction is necessary. Students then present their reviews and take questions. Reviews are collected and checked for adequacy of length, organization and comprehensibility. While some instructors may choose to do more with the written reviews, I fear that in doing so they may run the risk of de-motivating students by stressing 'correctness' in what is fundamentally an attempt to increase students' time on task in the least objectionable way possible. For instructors inclined to 'do more', I would recommend that adding comments that elicit further information or deeper reflection, or that draw the writer into a dialogue, are more appropriate in this context.

Procedure

Step 1 Pre-view Students are encouraged to view 5-10 minutes of a film for interest and difficulty before borrowing it. Students are then asked to brainstorm and write down vocabulary to describe the type of film they will see and to predict the plot and story lines that may occur. Once a film has been selected, its title is entered on the worksheet. If opening credits have appeared in the film, students should also complete the section for actor/actress at this time. Characters' names can be added while viewing the film. *Review* on Worksheet 1 refers to the number of this film review in the series of reviews assigned for the term.

Step 2 View/review Students are initially engaged in natural viewing for global comprehension of both language and the meaning of the film, as opposed to focussing on getting 'the answer'. They are instructed to stop, rewind the film and review if they are unable to understand, and to pay particular attention to the language used while reviewing. Students may at this time refer to subtitles or closed captions if they are unable to follow the dialogue. In the event that the film proves too difficult, they may exchange it for one which is easier to follow. Students are cautioned not to watch an entire film at one sitting unless they feel very confident in their ability to

understand the dialogue. It is advisable to recommend they either stop at predetermined intervals, when they feel that it is becoming increasingly difficult to follow the dialogue, or find 'natural' stopping places in the film and silently recall what they have seen at 'breaks'.

Step 3 Recall Students are asked to silently recall what has occurred in the film up to that point and to silently practice explaining the events in the film in English until they are able to provide an account of the action thus far. The frequency with which students feel they need to stop and review decreases in tandem with students' improved listening ability; the predetermined-interval / point-of-difficulty / natural-pause viewing approach outlined above should enable students to eventually emulate 'native'-like viewing patterns. From the outset, certain students are able to view either more quickly or more 'difficult' films than their classmates; this approach is also intended to enable such students to work at their own level and pace.

Step 4 Recount This is a 'talkaloud' activity which takes place in class every other week, after students have seen a complete film. Recount generally before learners begin their written reviews. This provides speaking practice and encourages a deeper level of language processing than simply pair checking 'the answers' would, and makes the learner responsible for effectively communicating information about the film rather than answering the discrete items typically required by listening texts. Learners provide a brief description of the development, major complications, the climax and the resolution of the plot. Record(ing) can take place before Recount(ing) if reversing the steps is better suited to the level of the class or student.

Step 5 Record Learners write a one-paragraph summary containing the development, major complications, the climax and the resolution of the plot. Alternatively, students can work in pairs and take dictation from a classmate's prepared written summary or a recounted/oral summary. This section is labelled *Plot Outline* on Worksheet 1.

Step 6 Rewind & replay Learners watch the film again and follow the same process oulined in steps 1-4 in developing an account of their impression of the film.

Step 7 Review Students write their impressions of the film they've seen and then rate it for level of interest and level of difficulty. Reviews are collected by the instructor and (can be) marked for grammatical correctness, comprehensibility, organization, or other relevant linguistic aspects. Students can be asked to rewrite their reviews, and final copies can be bound for future learners to use, both as pedagogical examples and as movie reviews. This section is labelled *Interpretation* on Worksheet 1. Students at this time also complete the top section of Worksheet 1, rating the film for interest and level of difficulty.

Step 8 Report Learners give oral reports on their impressions of the film and answer questions from interested classmates. Two or more students who have seen a particular film can also compare impressions or help one another with their oral reports.

And finally...

While the choice to use authentic video material might suggest that the focus of a lesson or activity may differ somewhat from a more 'traditional' listening approach – global vs. local, general vs. specific, 'answer' vs. respond to, 'right or wrong' vs. probable or possible, etc. – it does not necessarily have to. Instructors who feel strongly about the role of attention to form as a component of language instruction (van Lier 1989) can design tasks and activities aimed overtly at this aspect, though in so doing may run the risk of working at cross-purposes with their chosen medium of instruction.

For instructors who wish to draw students' attention to linguistic form, worksheets like Worksheet 2 are easily developed and can be made part of a student's assessment portfolio.

Authentic video material can supplement but not entirely replace traditional approaches to the teaching of listening, especially for students who are first beginning study, or who possess limited vocabulary or listening skills – but it is a very important bridge between natural language acquisition and 'real-world' language use. I feel that this approach is in keeping with both what Krashen (1982) posited concerning the role of comprehensible input and Swain's observation that, given a learner's need to express himself adequately, the need or desire to communicate will tend to focus the learner's attention on the language he or she will need to do so (1986, p. 249).

In MET Vol 7 No 4, in Chris Doye's article *Films for self study*, she listed the films her students particularly enjoyed. Here are some that my students rate highly.

The Secret Garden	The Shawshank Redemption	Titanic	The Sound of Music
City of Angels	Pretty Woman	My Life	My Friend Forever
Stand by Me	Good Will Hunting	Leon	Free Willy
Beauty & the Beast	Mrs. Doubtfire	Ghost	Mask
Patch Adams	The Spitfire Grill	Perfect World	The Game
Sixth Sense	Mr Holland's Opus	Home Alone	
		Home Alone II	

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Worksheet 1

Title: _____

This movie is:

☐ Great! ☐ Very Good ☐ Good ☐ Fair ☐ Poor ☐ Terrible!

Level of Difficulty:

☐ Very Hard ☐ Hard ☐ A Bit Hard ☐ Average ☐ Fairly Easy ☐ Easy

Actor/Actress: Role/Character:

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

Plot outline: briefly summarize the main events or plot developments of the film

_____

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Interpretation: Please express your feelings, opinions & observations about the characters, situations, dramatic development, costumes, scenery & special effects.

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Name_____ Date _____ Review#_____

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